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ABSTRACT

A crucial, parent-taught curriculum of success must compliment the work of the schools. This booklet details the components of that hidden curriculum and includes many specific strategies to help parents raise healthy achieving children. Three important parental commitments are discussed. (JD)

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# The Hidden Curriculum of Success

## *Why Dick and Jane Didn't Succeed Despite Every Advantage*

Bruce A. Baldwin

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This material has been excerpted from Bruce A. Baldwin's new book on parenting for success titled *Beyond the Cornucopia Kids: How To Raise Healthy Achieving Children!* It is available in bookstores or from Direction Dynamics, 309 Honeycutt Drive, Wilmington, NC 28403. The cost is $9.95 plus $1.50 postage (NC residents add $0.50 state tax). Telephone: (919) 799-6544.

A practicing psychologist and head of Direction Dynamics, Dr. Baldwin is a nationally recognized authority on lifestyle management and effective parenting. He is the author of three books and more than 120 published articles. A popular speaker, he responds each year to many requests for talks and seminars on these topics of concern to achieving men and women.

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# The Hidden Curriculum of Success

*The scene opens. It's dawn. Two small children hungrily wolf down a few scraps of food. In the sparsely furnished home, a dim bulb barely lights the kitchen. It's not quite warm inside and bitter outside, but it's time for school. Dad's been gone for hours putting in a typical 12 hour day at hard labor. With a mother's love, the two children are readied. Their ragged, patched jackets worn thin, shoes falling apart.*

*With a piece of day-old bread and a smidgeon of cheese for lunch, the kids leave. They slowly trudge the five miles to school through swirling drifts of snow. They return late in the afternoon to work until dusk so the family can survive. Then it's homework long into the night before a bone-tiring day finally ends. At six and eight years, the kids are exhausted. Only after long years of struggle against painful deprivation and hardship do they finally make it to success.*

This is the story that Dick and Jane's parents would love to tell, inspiring their children to toughen up, to overcome life's problems, and, thus, ultimately to succeed. The problem is that it just isn't true although neither parent had it particularly easy growing up. Both from modest

backgrounds, they had the basics at home, but little else. If they wanted something extra, hard work was the only way to get it. After they met and married, their struggle for success continued through more education, sacrifice, hard work, and doing without. Gradually, things got easier.

When Dick and Jane arrived, the family was economically comfortable. Living in a reasonably nice house in a reasonably nice neighborhood, the family had a stable income and was well-liked by neighbors. Dick and Jane were provided with every affordable advantage as their parents continued to sacrifice to help their children become successful. The kids went to a good school, were involved in many extracurricular activities, had the latest clothes, and were provided quite adequate spending money. Dick and Jane and their parents had become part of the Great American Middle Class.

There was only one catch. Despite obvious advantages, neither Dick nor Jane ever really "made it" as adults. The kids (now grown) had problems at work and at home in their marriages. Their parents were not only disappointed, but confused. They had done all the right things, hadn't they? What *was* the problem? In retrospect, it seemed that all the benefits they provided for the kids had had no real effect. Parental sacrifices seemed to count for nil. And, the children weren't even grateful! Their current attitudes revealed their immaturity. They had never really grown up.

Dick and Jane had become part of a contemporary American tragedy although neither they nor their parents realized it until too late. What happened here? What went wrong? In a nutshell, what Dick and Jane's now-successful parents failed to understand is that there are *two* complemen-

tary curricula of success that must be learned during the growing years. At school, one was well-taught to Dick and Jane (although not necessarily well-learned). At home, the other was almost completely neglected. Without a solid foundation of both, the kids' later success was sorely compromised.

## The First Curriculum: Formal Education Taught Primarily at School.

The core of the school experience focuses primarily on cognitive development. The primary task of the schools is to prepare young people to take their place in an extremely complex society where high levels of knowledge, related work skills, and understanding of a changing world are absolutely required.

## The Second Curriculum: Basic Life Skills Taught Primarily at Home.

This subject matter is composed of a constellation of values, skills, and behaviors that must be actively taught by parents. Complemented by intellectual knowledge, they powerfully influence career success, the quality of relationships, and the capacity for healthy living.

Although it sounds absurd, it's a fact that parental neglect of the home-based Hidden Curriculum of Success may easily create a family environment where the kids are inadvertently taught to fail! While many parents have an intuitive sense of the Hidden Curriculum, their intuitive wisdom too often is put aside because no one else seems to be reinforcing the same values. Their rationale is

erroneous: "If no one else is doing it, then it can't be right. Can it?" The answer, of course, is a resounding *yes*!

Here's the bottom line. *Unless well-intentioned parents can clearly conceptualize the Hidden Curriculum and actively teach it despite the fact that it makes them a bit different from neighbors, children may grow up educationally disadvantaged despite living in a good home with successful parents who have a quite adequate income.* Now let's pursue this most provocative statement. Let's explore the issues more thoroughly and take a closer look at why Dick and Jane didn't succeed despite every advantage!

## The Hidden Keys to Success

If the Hidden Curriculum of Success is primarily the responsibility of parents, then just what is it all about? It lies in seven highly interrelated areas of skill that simply cannot be learned through school alone. To teach the Second Curriculum well, parents must first accept the importance of these skills and understand how each one fits with success later in life. Then they must make needed changes at home to make each one of them an integral part of the family's values, thereby helping the children learn them.

The seven Keys to Success are defined here with a rationale and an explanation of what was missed in Dick and Jane's home environment. Included with each is a Home Values Assessment of several questions for parents to use as focal points for evaluating their parenting.

### The First Hidden Key: Parents Must Help Their Children Develop Internal Security and Personal Self-Acceptance.

*Rationale:* Living in a constantly changing and unpredictable world, it is necessary for youngsters to base self-esteem and personal security within themselves rather than relying on external factors to define personal adequacy.

The only emotionally healthy kind of personal security stems from acceptance and love provided by parents complemented by a stable home environment. Although growing up within a successful family, Dick and Jane were actually disadvantaged in this regard. If self-esteem is based on externals (the clothes worn, pocket money, fad items, and possessions), then that self-esteem is vulnerable because these externals can be taken away or may quickly go out of style.

Parents are the keys to helping their children build internal security. To do this, they must transcend an easy emphasis on "things" and provide instead time, caring, and expressed love. Security carried within as self-trust and self-acceptance is the only buffer against an unstable world and the vicissitudes of life.

At home, Dick and Jane were provided with just about everything they desired. At school, they wore the right clothes and had all the "in" things. As far as home life was concerned, there was little because they were never there! And, parents didn't insist on it because they were so busy themselves. Because of this, communication among family members was limited, thus producing no real sense of closeness. Home was basically a place to eat and sleep. Feeling guilty for not spending time with the kids, parents compensated by giving material things instead. Internally, the family was fragmented, but no one realized it until much later.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. As parents, do you affectionately touch your children regularly with hugs, pats on the back, and a caring shoulder to cry on when necessary?
2. Do you insist on adequate time during the week for all family members to be together, share experiences, and just talk?
3. In your relationship with each of your children, do you regularly and spontaneously tell them they are loved, no matter what?
4. As parents, do you model emotional closeness and intimacy in your marriage for the kids to observe and imitate?
5. Can and do you say "no" to requests for fad items by the kids who want them just because everyone else has them?

## The Second Hidden Key: The Children Must Learn a Sense of Personal Accountability.

*Rationale:* To succeed in a career and to have healthy relationships, it is necessary to accept personal responsibility for actions and their consequences.

A stark reality is that the expectations of the world demand personal accountability — that is, accepting the direct relationship between behavior and consequences. Through *external* limits initially set by parents, a child gradually learns to control responses and live by *internal* limits later in life. From this perspective, parental discipline is the road to learning self-discipline and personal control.

Conversely, when parents neglect discipline or when they help children avoid the consequences of their behavior, the youngsters experience a rude

awakening later in the adult world where personal accountability is an absolute must.

During their growing years, Dick and Jane didn't experience much in the way of discipline. It wasn't that their parents didn't try. The fact was that both parents were vulnerable, and the kids from an early age learned to manipulate them. The problem was compounded by parental denial. They just didn't want to believe *their* kids were misbehaving even when the evidence was clear. And, Dick and Jane always had such convincing excuses: A coincidence. A case of mistaken identity. It was someone else's fault. An accident. Somebody's trying to get me into trouble. To make matters worse, Dick and Jane's parents wanted their kids to be successful so badly that they routinely "fixed" problems for them. And, they weren't averse to telling a little white lie on their offsprings' behalf when they were in trouble.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. As parents, do you agree on reasonable limits for the kids and support one another in demanding that they be respected?
2. Do you consistently respond positively to and reward the kids for staying within set limits?
3. When there is a problem, do you get all the facts and then decide what to do instead of always believing the kids' excuses?
4. Have you identified your personal vulnerabilities so the kids can't manipulate you to escape discipline?
5. When your child is in the wrong, do you insist that the consequences be faced with follow-through as necessary?

## The Third Hidden Key: Parents Must Help Their Children Learn Healthy

## ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION.

*Rationale:* Meeting challenges and reaching personal goals require a base of personal experience with success — success attained by overcoming hardships, obstacles, and setbacks.

Many naive parents easily succeed in providing their children with myriad opportunities to sample new experiences. However, as quantity is inadvertently chosen over quality, the kids don't follow through on anything. The children move from activity to activity, staying with each one only as long as it is fun and new. When it becomes difficult or routine, it's off to something else. Within, such children don't learn healthy achievement motivation that depends on making things happen through persistence, hard work, acceptance of adversity, and the successful surmounting of obstacles.

Throughout their development, Dick and Jane had fun to a fault. They were provided with a smorgasbord of extracurricular involvements (some of them quite expensive). The parental rationale was that such activities were not only opportunities to learn, but would give their children an edge over others. However, parents didn't spot the telltale pattern. The kids never really stayed with anything for long.

Furthermore, parents didn't insist that they do so. The children whined and wheedled, claiming boredom. Soon they were off to something else. Over the years, neither child developed commitment to an activity or high levels of skill at anything. And, neither coped well with hardship, failure, and problems. They escaped instead. Not surprisingly, Dick and Jane's "fun and games" development seriously compromised successfully meeting challenges later in life.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. Do you insist that your children limit their activities and do fewer things well instead of many things superficially?
2. Do you support persistence in what your children do with lots of encouragement and positive feedback when there are difficulties?
3. Is there within the family an insistence that children follow through to completion projects or activities once started?
4. As parents, do you help your children to accept failure as part of success and to use setbacks as learning experiences?
5. Even though it's painful, do you avoid taking over when a child is experiencing a problem, instead helping that child assume personal control of the situation?

## The Fourth Hidden Key: Your Children Must Develop a Positive Relationship to the Work World.

*Rationale:* A direct relationship exists between work skills and attitudes that are primarily learned through home-based work responsibilities and one's success as an adult.

As youngsters, Dick and Jane's parents had to work for any extras. They did odd jobs around the neighborhood and eventually clerked part-time at local stores. Both also worked to help pay their way through college. It was difficult but rewarding. After years of dedication and hard work, they finally moved over the hump economically.

Now, as part of the benefits of their success, Dick and Jane were spared the same kinds of experiences. From day one, the kids were provided with plenty of spending money and were assigned

no responsibilities for chores at home. Further, they had little incentive to do odd jobs because they already had everything they needed in the way of cash and purchasing power.

As you may have already guessed, because of their parents' misguided motives, Dick and Jane had very poor attitudes about work because they had not experienced much of it during their development. They did homework only if pushed by parents and, correspondingly, their work habits were atrocious. They did only what they had to do to get by and no more.

Thus, when they later faced the work world and its expectations for punctuality, initiative, acceptance of responsibility, and respect for authority, they were ill-prepared. Well-meaning parents had spared them critical learning experiences. Despite being bright, Dick and Jane as adults adjusted with great difficulty to the work world and fared poorly in their careers.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. In your household, do your children have regular chores for which they are responsible?
2. Do you as parents encourage your children to earn extra money through odd jobs and entrepreneurial activities?
3. Do your children know the direct relationship between personal effort and reward because you don't provide free cash for the asking?
4. At home, do you engage in cooperative work projects with the kids as a way to make the experience more pleasurable and to model positive work habits?
5. As parents, do you hold the line and not pay in advance for work unfinished or for projects poorly done?

## The Fifth Hidden Key: Teaching Your Children Good Manners and Social Sensitivity is a Must.

*Rationale:* A sound understanding of people and related social skills is a basic requirement for success at work and for fulfilling relationships with loved ones.

Dick and Jane's parents knew what good manners were, but they were also very protective. Whenever there was a problem, they automatically took their child's side. At home, they didn't insist on good manners at all times. It just didn't seem that important. And, because parents were so busy and under pressure so much of the time, they weren't always paragons of politeness themselves! The kids learned through neglect and negative example that they didn't have to respect anyone's needs or rights except their own. As a result, they grew up with little empathic understanding of relationships or others' emotional needs.

These self-centered attitudes caused Dick and Jane many problems later in life. You already know that eventually most career paths require strong people-skills. In addition, solid relationship skills are needed in every facet of life beyond work: to create a mutually fulfilling relationship with a spouse, to be a positive parent, and to get along well with friends. Only naive parents neglect this vitally important part of their children's education. No matter how intellectually talented, men and women without interpersonal sensitivity, good manners, and well-developed relationship skills are at a disadvantage.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. Do you insist that your children be polite and

exercise basic good manners in public and at home?
2. As parents, do you practice good manners in your marital relationship so your children can learn directly from you?
3. When there is a problem, do you insist on getting all parties together to talk it out and find a reasonable solution?
4. If your child has been rude or insensitive, do you insist on a sincere apology personally delivered?
5. Do you as parents excuse children's rudeness or disrespect toward you because they are angry or upset?

## The Sixth Hidden Key: Your Children are Taught Sound Money Management Skills Beginning Early in Life.

*Rationale:* To effectively manage increasingly complex family finances and to prevent stress and conflict that stem from financial irresponsibility, well-developed money management skills are required.

Parents who fail to teach their children financial management skills limit their ability to live the good life later. Though making an adequate salary, many well-trained men and women live from one financial crisis to another because they lack these critical skills. And, research has shown that one of the major sources of stress for individuals and families is fiscal mismanagement. These days, maintaining a middle class family's economic stability is quite similar to running a small business. And, the family's finances must also be continually adapted to constant change and evolving needs.

Now let's look at Dick and Jane's experience. As they grew, they consistently received more than adequate spending money. And, spend they did — every bit of what they received and whatever else they could coax out of compliant parents who wanted their children to have all they themselves didn't have. With more allowance than needed, Dick and Jane had no need to budget or save for anything. Why should they? They got virtually everything they wanted just for the asking. Further, they developed a most cavalier attitude about possessions. When something was broken or lost, it was replaced almost immediately. Years later, when Dick and Jane entered the real world, they were traumatized by their lack of training in money management.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. As a strong parenting value, do you mandate that your children save at least some of their money for future purposes?
2. Do you provide kids with a set and limited weekly allowance which requires them to budget what they spend?
3. As parents, do you limit *your* use of credit and not permit your children to use your credit cards?
4. If one of your children breaks a toy in anger or maliciously damages property, do you insist on repayment?
5. As parents, do you reinforce care of possessions because the kids know they won't automatically be replaced if misused?

## The Seventh Hidden Key: A Well-Developed Ability To Relax and Play Is Taught by Parents.

*Rationale:* Because of emotional fatigue resulting

from constant mental work and from the intellectual demands of getting through each day, regular relaxation is necessary to promote health and enjoy life.

The effects of technological complexity on health and well-being are only now being understood. These days, work is rapidly evolving away from manual labor in the direction of constant mental work using high levels of intellectual skills. And, the complexity of living requires that individuals continue to think and learn at home: to operate a new appliance, to keep up with tax changes, to help a child put together a "simple" toy. Such mental work requires tremendous energy and leads to emotional exhaustion if not followed by adequate relaxation time. Because of the nature of today's work, parents must teach their children how to relax, not only as a bonus for hard work well done, but also as a health mandate.

As with most of their childhood friends, the pressures on Dick and Jane to succeed were constant. However, as they grew older, having been consistently protected by parents from life's realities, they also became quite insecure. Not only did they not achieve much, but both children were chronic worriers because they had not learned the skills necessary to cope well with challenges, problems, and setbacks. Their anxieties and fears prevented them from enjoying life even when they had the time. And, because they couldn't relax, they didn't gain the emotional benefits of time away from work. Stress symptoms, chronic negativism, and personal discontent were the result.

*Home Values Assessment*

1. As parents, do you regularly take time for

yourselves and with the children to enjoy pleasant and relaxing experiences?
2. When relaxing, do you focus on enjoying the experience rather than meeting goals, having products to show for time spent, or intensely competing against others?
3. With the kids, do you as parents encourage quality time spent in relaxation as essential for health and well-being?
4. In competitive games, do you encourage the kids to do their best, but still play for fun instead of always needing to win or to be the best?
5. Do you as parents help your children appreciate the beauty around them and enjoy life's simple (and inexpensive) pleasures?

## Parenting for "Goodness of Fit"

The basic thesis of the *Hidden Curriculum of Success* is that while good grades and a solid formal education are certainly important, they are simply not enough these days. It's a naive, but easy trap to assess potential for success by narrowly focusing only on how a child is doing at school. This parental stance completely misses skills essential in the marketplace and in life itself that are not necessarily reflected in schoolwork at all.

As a way to keep your child's education at home *and* at school in clear perspective, keep in the forefront of your mind "goodness of fit." This requires that you use as a framework for assessing your child's educational progress the expectations of the marketplace and life in general.

To illustrate this important point, consider yourself to be an employer for a moment. Then think of the qualifications you would seek in a

candidate for a job. Beyond formal educational requirements and necessary credentials, here are the qualities most often sought: initiative, getting along well with people, a positive attitude, ability to work independently, trustworthiness, perseverance, willingness to learn, punctuality, ability to handle responsibility, honesty.

What is interesting, however, is what you probably didn't mention: The individual's IQ. The prestige of the school attended. Perhaps not even grades. Now take another look at the above qualities. You will notice that virtually all of them reflect life values that are part of the *Hidden Curriculum of Success* that is either taught or neglected at home.

*The question that parents must continually assess is whether the values and skills taught at home are congruent with the values and skills expected at work and in life itself.*

When they match, that's "goodness of fit"!

With the increasing complexity of contemporary lifestyle, you must now realize that the Second Curriculum is steadily becoming more important for parents to recognize and teach. The rationale is simple. The skills and values that together define this critical learning are most easily learned gradually and with parental guidance all through the developmental years.

Conversely, these skills are most difficult and often traumatic to learn after a young adult has left the family. And, regardless of economic status, those children whose parents actively teach the Hidden Curriculum of Success gain a tremendous advantage over those who must "catch up" by learning it later in life.

To their credit, some savvy parents have been teaching this home-based curriculum all along.

And, more parents are actively beginning to do so. However, even under the best of circumstances it's not an easy task. To do it well, there are several commitments that you must make as a parent.

## Parental Commitment No. 1: To Clarity of Foresight.

Teaching the Hidden Curriculum necessitates that you clearly understand the issues and accept the importance of your role as a parent in determining your child's ultimate success. Remember that your children will get no grades for learning this home-based curriculum. You will have to rely on common sense, your awareness of deeper values, and your observational skills to assess progress and to ultimately prevail in your teaching.

## Parental Commitment No. 2: To Containment of Material Giving.

You may not be rich, but you probably have more to give to your children materially than your parents had to give to you. Therein lies the problem. To learn the same basic values that you did to succeed in life requires direct teaching and struggle. When everything is given to them, children don't develop character. As a parent, the question for you these days is more difficult than in the past: "If you have it, are you strong enough *not* to give it so that your children will grow up to be healthy achievers?"

## Parental Commitment No. 3: To Character in Your Parenting.

Make no mistake about it, the kids will take all they can get from you. That's immaturity speaking. And, these days children are able to place tremendous psychological pressure on parents to get what they want. Vulnerable parents often easily give into the "everyone's doing it so it must be right" attitude toward parenting. You must have strength of character to resist these powerful influences. And, you must have enough self-trust and personal resolve to be a bit different from everyone else.

### A Final Point

The values reflected in the *Hidden Curriculum of Success* are actually quite traditional. But with more complex contemporary lifestyles, these basic values are more difficult to see and to teach effectively. If you do, the rewards for you and for your children will be great. Because you provided "goodness of fit" for your family, your children will "fit in" as well-rounded, competent adults. If you don't, after two hundred years a bit of wisdom inscribed on a Revolutionary War rum horn may yet apply to you as a parent: "Ye prudent forseeth the evil; ye simple pass on and are punished." So be it.

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